

~~SECRET~~ 18

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RSC BRIEFING

DATE: 2 Jan 80
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FRENCH ELECTIONS

- I. Increased registrations and quickened tempo French electoral campaign:
 - A. Over 1,200,000 new voters registered.
 - B. Candidates are drawing record crowds in record number meetings.
 - C. Poll indicates record 88% plan to vote.
- II. Basically three-cornered race - with many tickets and alliances competing for non-Communist vote - ^{reduces} rules out possibility of really stable majority.
 - A. Communists.
 - (1) Confident that alliances this time - unlike 1951 - will be unable to deprive them of seats commensurate with popular strength.
 - (2) Playing up worker solidarity and pressing for left government.
 - B. Mendes-France Republican Front.
(Socialists, most Radicals and minority of ex-Gaullists)
 - (1) Attacking Right-Center "stagnation."
 - (2) Advocating parliamentary and electoral reform to strengthen executive
 - (3) Aiming largely at protest votes which usually go to Communists.
 - (4) Trying also for youth vote.
 - (5) Mendes-France attempting to create foreign affairs issue by attacking ~~Secretary's~~ acceptance of 1955 NATO Council statement on Soviet Middle East

C. Faure-Pinay coalition.

(Popular Republicans, conservatives, bloc of Independents, Peasants, most ex-Gaullists; also right wing Radicals)

- (1) Playing up current prosperity and promise of higher living standards.
- (2) Aiming at Mendes-France youth following with cut in military service.
- (3) Also asking support for reform permitting easier dissolution of parliament.

D. Anti-tax rightists (Poujadists, mainly) running negative campaign against both Mendes-France and Faure candidates.

- (1) So far not against Communists.
- (2) Their activity responsible for some violence so far.

III. Contest between Mendes-France bloc and Faure-Pinay confused because:

- A. Mendes-France and Pinay very close in basic ideology, differing only on method.
- B. Both blocs include wide range of opinions.
- C. Formal platforms of two blocs very similar
 - (1) Only clear issue separating them is state aid for church schools (opposed by Mendes-France bloc.)

IV. Both Pinay and Mendes-France pessimistic:

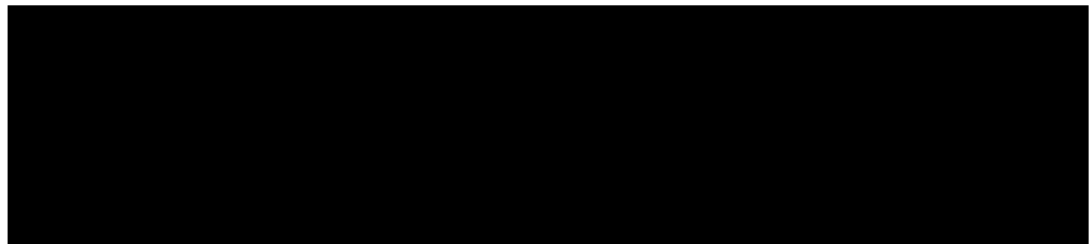
A. Pinay fears loss of votes to anti-tax candidates, thus forcing use of proportional representation in many areas and giving seats to Communists.

B. Mendes-France states privately his Republican Front can hope for only about 150 seats.

V. Both major non-Communist blocs vulnerable on Saar issue:

A. Mendes-France on failure of his "Western European Union solution."

B.



C. But results of the Saar Landtag elections (18 December) will help remove Saar as major electoral issue:

(1) Failure of pro-German blocs to win 75% of Landtag reduces danger of stirring up French public.

(2) Present moderate Saar government will retain office until after French elections.

VI. *Well-informed source* Ministry of Interior estimates, as of ²¹ 13 December, for the ⁵⁹⁶ ~~554~~ seats *which excludes only the 30 assigned to Algeria.* for Metropolitan France.

A. Communists to gain up to ³⁵⁻⁴⁰ ~~25~~ seats, giving them about ¹³⁵ ~~125~~.

B. About ¹⁵⁰~~149~~ seats for Mendes-France's Republican Front.

C. About ³⁰⁰~~272~~ seats for Faure-Pinay coalition.

(1) Largest gains for Pinay's independents;

~~(2) Popular Republicans lose some seats;~~

(2)(3) Overall Gaullist strength ^{reduced below} ~~cut in half~~;

D. Extreme right 10.

⁴² are ^{from overseas areas} ~~42 seats to be filled from overseas areas~~

F. ~~30 Algerian seats to be filled later.~~